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## THE DIRECT METHOD IN LATIN TEACHING: A REPLY

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It is a fundamental principle of justice that no one shall be condemned without a thorough trial. On this ground I feel that a reply must be made to Professor Kirtland's article on the Direct Method, published in the *Classical Journal* for June, 1913.

Near the beginning of his paper he says: "I have been unable to find a single American school in which it [the direct method] has been used throughout even the first year of the school course." Is not that fact in itself sufficient reason why it should be given every possible opportunity to prove itself, that it may stand or fall according to the results? If Mr. Kirtland "holds radical views regarding the necessity of a reform in our teaching," and yet maintains that "at this critical time we cannot afford to try any experiments that may fail," where are we coming to anyway? The very nature of experiment involves liability to failure, and it is obvious that something must be done if Latin is to hold its place.

The tenets of the Direct Method are: (1) The thing, act, idea should be associated directly with the Latin expression, not with an English translation of it. (2) The forms and syntax should be taught by use, inductively, not as abstract phenomena to be applied later to the language itself. (3) Understanding must come before translation, which is in the later years a valuable exercise but not the ultimate aim. (4) Oral handling of the work, being more flexible, should precede writing.

Let us see how Professor Kirtland has handled these points. He says: "We may safely adopt all that goes with the direct method except its directness." In other words, he rejects almost *in toto* the first principle. His references to this feature of the matter are rather indefinite. He says: "I cannot be persuaded that the average student can be brought to think in Latin, as it is called, without an enormous and unprofitable expenditure of time." Of course we

agree that "thinking in Latin" simply means that an idea suggests a Latin expression rather than an English expression. Naturally this is possible only in so far as the Latin expressions have been made familiar: to this degree I have the testimony of many of my pupils, now in their second or third half-year of the subject, that gradually they are coming to find the Latin uppermost in their minds, and that the English words do not come first. Indeed, it would be passing strange if it were otherwise, as in the class the pupils hear Latin almost exclusively and in its interpretation the English language is almost entirely avoided. This being true, it means that our pupils are learning Latin as Latin, not as a strange language having no meaning except as it is interpreted through the vernacular. A feature of this direct appeal is that not only the eyes and hands of the pupils are employed, but also their ears and their tongues. It therefore follows that the center of our interest and of our teaching is no longer the subject, but the child, whose fullest development is thus brought about.

On the second principle Mr. Kirtland says: "I do not for one moment suppose that the highest knowledge of a language consists in familiarity with the grammatical categories in which its usages are classified. . . . I am concerned only with the pedagogical problem." I believe we have met the objection indicated here—the trouble with the pedagogical problem—by the device of the paradigm- and syntax-sentences. The forms are learned, and accurately learned; but only in sentences, where they have in every case a meaning of their own; only in the order in which such usages can be logically developed; never as a mass of meaningless material, to be clothed later on—often much later on—with a set of abstract rules to explain their use.

When we consider the matter of translation, which must include turning English into Latin as well as Latin into English, there comes a distinct parting of the ways. "I do not for one moment suppose that the highest knowledge of a language," says Professor Kirtland, "has any inherent and necessary connection with translation." He speaks of translation, however, as "agreed until just now [to be] the chief justification of the place of Latin in the schools," and quotes Professor Bennett: "Mastery over the resources of one's

mother tongue . . . . comes as the direct and necessary result of careful translation." I do not deny the great value of translation, but I do deny its value as it is ordinarily done, even when the conventional method is almost ideally successful in accomplishing its specific purpose. The mere struggle with sentences and phrases and terms, back of which there is no clear idea, can only result at best, even if done with entire honesty, in a patchwork of ideas, presenting individual expressions which have been learned as usable equivalents of the Latin. That the task in the earlier years, if conscientiously performed, is for most pupils a matter of extreme difficulty, cannot be denied. When, however, translation means searching for the most fitting English phrase to embody the idea and parallel the style of the Latin, then the pupil has before him an exercise of greatest value for his logical and linguistic faculties, and he is well on his way to an adequate appreciation of his authors—but not until such immediate comprehension is his. Pupils approaching Latin this way will not regard it as an unnatural, artificial mass of words, making miserable English if translated as it stands, and unjustifiably free translation if put into good English. As for translation into Latin, the Direct Method leaves no need of it in the earlier years; later it is valuable just as is Latin-English translation.

Oral handling of the work Mr. Kirtland justifies, and "even Latin conversation, so far as it does not add to the student's burden." Certainly conversation is anything but an end in the method. In so far as oral question and answer make alive, and, by preceding writing, tend to obviate the fixing of errors in the pupils' minds, they are valuable. Beyond that, of course Latin must be the language of the classroom, this being an essential support of the directness of teaching and understanding.

So much for the tenets of the Direct Method, and Professor Kirtland's views upon them. There are also a few general observations in his paper upon which I should like to say a word. "None of them [advocates of the Direct Method] has explained how it came to be abandoned." We are not trying to bring a dead horse to life. When Latin ceased to be used as a living tongue, only the dry bones of formalistic teaching remained. The obvious need of

ability to speak Latin being removed, the whole substance of the prevailing methods was swept away, and what remained was believed to have value partly because it was hard and partly because it was disagreeable. We now believe that certain characteristics of that old teaching were good, and can be applied now. We should not go back to them altogether, any more than we should again advocate the learning by heart of the grammar from cover to cover.

As concerns the method for modern languages, Mr. Kirtland says: "The newer ways of teaching the modern languages have started with the assumption that the methods used in teaching the classics were not valid for living tongues belonging to our own civilization. Then it has not yet been established that the Direct Method is the best way of teaching American boys and girls the modern languages." And later, "As to speaking, how many of our teachers of French and German can do that fluently and correctly in the language which they teach?" The modern-language teachers adopted the methods of classical teachers because they had no methods of their own, and few teachers were well prepared. They are now making methods of their own, with well-equipped teachers. That the Direct Method is rapidly becoming the accepted method with them, and that it is no longer on trial, is clearly shown in Professor Handschin's recent report to the United States Commissioner of Education. The teachers of Latin are not aping them, but are working out their problems carefully in their own way; that they do coincide in important particulars is not surprising. As regards ability to speak the modern language taught, it will hardly be denied that the deplorable condition to which Professor Kirtland refers is rapidly being done away.

"Mr. Jones can say: '. . . [ancient] literature cannot be thoroughly appreciated by anybody, unless he can speak, and apprehend when spoken, the ancient language.'" Mr. Kirtland takes direct issue with this. But Mr. Jones's statement applies to a field much wider than that composed of boys and girls studying Latin by the direct method. If we insist on "thoroughly appreciated" we must limit our consideration to men of scholarship. I have little question that the great commentators could speak Greek and Latin with great ease. Mr. Jones would put our pupils

in that respect at least in the same favorable position toward the classics that the great scholars occupied. But the scholars' ability does not prove that they did not acquire that power in spite of the way they were taught the classics. Familiar are the instances of college presidents, surprised by an address in Latin, who replied extemporaneously in the same tongue. I recall being told myself by one of the greatest teachers who ever held a chair in Mr. Kirtland's own school of his experience in the use of spoken Latin many years ago in Italy, when he knew no Italian and his chance acquaintance knew no English. Professor Cilley was probably never taught to talk Latin, but his was a scholarly mind, and he knew the language. Professor Kirtland could without doubt talk Latin easily if he tried.

As regards practical obstacles to a general adoption of the method, many of them would at once disappear upon the method's becoming general. If pupils were transferred from one school to another, those taught by the old methods would then suffer, not the others. Examinations set to test ability in the new direction would simply undo pupils taught in the old. If we could not get a smattering of a great deal, we could at least get a thorough knowledge of less; and I believe in the end we should cover much more ground. In my own experience I have not found the methods too puerile for boys and girls just entering the high school; reluctance on their part to speak in a foreign tongue has gradually disappeared as they gained confidence; even classes of forty I have found possible, although of course by no means desirable for any method. And while such a plan must doubtless be tried first by the teachers who have the best training, I have seen the teaching itself such an inspiration to those whose specific knowledge perhaps was less that they have grown in scholarship and ability by leaps and bounds. Of course it would be madness to let every Latin teacher in the country try the Direct Method all at once, unguided. But there are many who have the equipment to do it now, and as soon as it has justified itself the means for training the younger generation of instructors will be found in abundant measure.

Professor Kirtland agrees that something must be done. Let him, then, and others who do not feel that they are in a position to

make the experiments, wait until the methods have had a thorough test in America. We are firmly convinced that the direct approach, given a fair trial, will solve the problem. Teachers can no longer sit back and "hear lessons"; the pupil is demanding his own, and will receive it; and the teacher must adjust himself accordingly. I have the utmost faith in the scholarly conscience of my colleagues, among whom I am glad to number Mr. Kirtland, that they will hold an open mind until they are convinced; and that they will ultimately be convinced I am equally sure.